

Carolina Juniors Volleyball History

A History of Carolina Juniors Volleyball - (1995-2017)

In the Fall of 1995, Allan and Kelly Haseley founded Volleyball Unlimited and leased a warehouse in South Charlotte. Their plans for their 4-court volleyball center were to be open only on weeknights for adult volleyball leagues and to charge just enough to break even. The intention was not for this venture to be a full time business, but merely a means for them and all their volleyball friends to continue to play volleyball.

Shortly after opening Volleyball Unlimited, they were approached by Marilyn Thompson, director of Charlotte Juniors, and Tiger Shelton, director of Mizuno South. These club directors were looking for a place for their Junior Olympic teams to practice. Like most clubs, they had been using school gyms at odd hours, practicing once a week, sharing courts, using different facilities each week, etc. Since the courts were not in use after school or on Sundays, Volleyball Unlimited agreed to let junior teams use them for the next six months at the price of insurance (\$35 per player). These practices ended up costing Volleyball Unlimited significantly more; for staff, setup, supplies and utilities, but Volleyball Unlimited and the Haseleys were glad to help support youth volleyball in the area.

1995-1997: In the fall of 1996, Tiger Shelton proposed merging his youth volleyball club with Volleyball Unlimited to start a new citywide club. Since adult leagues were not filling the courts to capacity, Volleyball Unlimited agreed to this partnership. Allan and Tiger met with coach Joe Sagula from UNC to form a business plan and came up with the name Carolina Juniors Volleyball (CJV), hoping to draw the best players from North and South Carolina. The plan was to make three premier teams that could compete regionally in the Open division at the 18's, 16's and 14's age groups.

At the first CJV tryouts, 150 girls showed up. In the best interests of the youth players and teams in the Charlotte area, the directors of the three existing Charlotte youth clubs (Mizuno South, Charlotte Juniors, and Queen City Rivals) decided to close down and support one unified club for all of Charlotte and the surrounding areas. The goal was to have the best talent to all be able to play together, and not have parents and players decide what tryouts to attend and which club to play for. With the help of some of the top area coaches such as Tiger Shelton, Suzie Pignetti, Howard Barnhill, Zoe Bell and many others, CJV was born. Due to the overwhelming number of teams, and since Tiger and the other club directors were also coaching teams, Volleyball Unlimited handled the administration part of CJV. The first year was a challenge finding enough coaches for 150 girls, but everyone was focused on making CJV's first year a success. In the end, all girls got on a team and were able to play.

1997-1999: In 1997, Tiger moved back to California to coach club volleyball, so CJV hired Kevin Campbell to work for Volleyball Unlimited and direct the CJV club. Kevin was a former college player, and since she also was a head coach for a CJV team, Volleyball Unlimited remained involved to revamp the program and help her gain experience, as she was new to the job. CJV continued to grow and improve.

Meanwhile, adult volleyball interest in the area waned. Late in 1997, the Haseleys realized that the Charlotte volleyball community could not support a four-court "volleyball only" facility. Faced with the choice of closing or reorganizing, they did some research and found that volleyball could only be financially stable as part of a multi-sport operation. They decided to make the business a full-time operation including several sports such as volleyball, soccer, basketball, and more. In 1998, Volleyball Unlimited broke ground on a new 1.5 million dollar multi-sports facility at 10930 Granite Street. When it opened in November of 1998, Volleyball Unlimited and Carolina Juniors combined with other sports to become "Sports Warehouse." Tim Loesch and Beth Phifer helped Kevin Campbell and Wendy Street in running the growing club.

1999-2002: Late in 1999, Tim Loesch took over as CJV program director. Beth and Wendy continued to assist with the club and CJV began competing in more out of state events, gaining national exposure for players, teams and club.

2003-2005: Beth Phifer was one of the first Volleyball Unlimited/Carolina Juniors/Sports Warehouse employees in 1996 and became the club director at the start of the 2003 season. She kept building the club, improving the program for coaches, players and parents while remaining true to its mission through 2005. Sports Warehouse staff stayed active with CJV behind the scenes, helping with marketing, accounting and logistics. Tim and Kevin went on to be college coaches, and Suzie, Howard, and Zoe continued to be successful high school coaches, administrators, and CJV club coaches.

In 2005, around the 10-year anniversary of Sports Warehouse and Carolina Juniors Volleyball, Carrie Ramsey (Christian) a player with CJV since 1995, when she was 14 years old, and a CJV coach since 2000, began helping the Sports Warehouse and CJV directors develop a "local" program. Tim Leary, an accomplished men's adult volleyball player and successful high school coach, joined Carrie and CJV in helping coach players and train new coaches in the new CJV local program.

The goal of the new local program was to begin introducing volleyball to a group of girls that, in the past were not able to participate in the only other option in town, which was travel club volleyball. Many of these Local Players may have had the skill to compete on a travel team, but lacked the time or money, and were often involved in other sports or activities, or they were beginner players that just wanted an opportunity to learn and play volleyball.

The local program, in only its second year, had over 300 girls participating on teams that practiced twice a week and played in league games on the weekends. In addition to the 300 local players, CJV also had 10 USAV travel teams, with three competing at the National level, and seven at the Regional level, with a total of 457 girls and coaches competing on teams and another 307 attending camps and clinics.

2005-2013: Starting in 2005, Carrie quickly began taking ownership of the CJV Local Program while Suzie and Howard managed the travel teams, Allan and Sports Warehouse assisted with the administration and operations of CJV, and many other coaches, like Zoe Bell, Rick Kiser, Melanie Jaehnen, Cori Bray, Brian Rosen, Karen Bradbury, and others, assisted with the growth of CJV.

Also in 2005, Allan and Sports Warehouse (located in South Charlotte), partnered with Evan Miller of Charlotte Sports Center (located in North Charlotte) to begin offering joint adult leagues, programs, parties, camps, central customer database, and started a CJV program on the North side of Charlotte, inside the Charlotte Sports Center. This partnership allowed the owners of the two existing Sports Centers in Charlotte to compare numbers and business plans that lead them to the same conclusion the Haseleys had discovered in 1998: that a Sports Facility focusing on just one or two sports was not the most profitable to maintain a successful business for the long term. Therefore, Allan and Evan began planning for the future of Sports and Family Entertainment in the Charlotte area by buying land in the South Charlotte-Ballantyne area to design and build a Family Entertainment Center that would complement the existing two Sports Centers by providing additional activities for the entire family such as bowling, laser tag, games and rides, rock climbing, a fitness center, and a café. This partnership and new focus for Sports Warehouse would prove to be the best decision for Sports Warehouse to continue to support and subsidize the Carolina Juniors Volleyball Club for the long term, and focus on quality volleyball programs at an affordable price, versus expecting the CJV Club to support and fund volleyball courts and facilities on its own.

In 2007, Sports Warehouse changed its name to Sports Connection and the 65,000 square feet, 6.5 million dollar "Sports Connection Family Entertainment Center" opened in the Ballantyne area of Charlotte. It was also in 2007 that Carrie felt she was ready to take over the administration side of CJV and be a full time CJV and high school volleyball coach. The timing was perfect since Allan and the entire Sports Connection staff was challenged with hiring hundreds of employees, managing the new business, and was unable to help with the CJV program like in the past 12 years. Carrie became the administration and non-travel director of CJV, while Suzie and Zoe continued to lead the USAV travel team program.

With all the other changes happening with Sports Connection, and the tremendous growth of the local program in only the first two years, CJV decided it was time to invite all the other travel volleyball clubs in the area together for a meeting to discuss the past, present, and future of girl's volleyball in the area. So in August of 2007, CJV invited IC Stars, Covenant Day, Union Volleyball Club (now CUVC), Lake Norman Volleyball Club (now LKN), and Race City Sports to meet with Allan, Suzie, Zoe, Howard, Karen, Rick, Melanie, and others to meet.

Summary of the 2007 Meeting:

Most clubs only offered travel teams for the more competitive players that required tryouts, and the only option was to play in USAV sponsored tournaments that were mostly not in Charlotte. Most of these programs were expensive, and often excluded a number of girls that could not afford the fees or the time involved to play on a travel team. These travel teams helped improve a select few

players in the area, but did not make a dent in improving the larger number of younger players and introducing volleyball players to the masses.

As we analyzed other sports such as soccer, basketball, and softball, we realized all of these other sports had local organizations, grassroots programs and LOCAL leagues to promote their sport. Some were sponsored and offered by Parks & Rec, YMCAs, Neighborhood Rec Associations, soccer clubs, and many by state or national sponsored associations. Volleyball only had USAV travel teams. CJV's goal was not to do away with travel teams, but instead figure out a way to identify all the girls in the area wanting to learn and play volleyball, organize them into teams, and provide them the best opportunity to play with other players in the area that had the same skills and goals without having them to spend a lot of money, time, and travel just to play volleyball.

With the incredible number of participants in the local program in the first two years, we felt if other clubs would begin offering a similar local program, we could have our own local volleyball association (CVA - Carolinas Volleyball Association) to offer local leagues for the masses, and then competitive travel teams for the elite players that needed to be seen Nationally for college recruiting. Unfortunately, the results of the meeting were met with some skepticism as most of the attendees were competitive coaches and clubs whose main goal was to find the strongest players in their area and only focus on a few competitive teams to enter them in USAV competition, not as much to develop a program for the younger players and grow the sport of volleyball. So CJV and Sports Connection set out on a path to continue to develop and provide a volleyball club and program for all ages and skills and changed the name from Local Program and USAV Program to Non-Travel Teams and Travel Teams.

Sports Connection and CJV experienced incredible growth and expansion from 2007-2011, and in 2011 were able purchase the former Charlotte Sports Center (now Sport Connection-Northlake) and converted the one time "Sports Only" facility to a Sports & Family Entertainment Center, with three volleyball courts, soccer, basketball, fitness center, laser tag, games and rides, and a café.

With the renewed commitment to growing girls volleyball in North Charlotte, Sports Connection and CJV hired Amanda Valbert in 2011 to head up CJV-Northlake. Amanda, working with Carrie and Tim, was able to grow the CJV Non-Travel North Program from 2011-2013 to over 500 girls and coaches per year. The entire Non-Travel Program has over 1200 girls participating each year as of 2013.

Between 2013 and 2014, with the CJV numbers continuing to grow, Sports Connection expanded the Granite Street location from four to five volleyball courts, and expanded the number of courts at the Northlake location from three to four courts, bringing the total number of dedicated volleyball courts to nine to be used by the CJV Club.

2014-Present: In June 2014, Carrie decided to step down as the CJV Director to focus on raising two young sons and to coach high school volleyball, versus being the director of the growing club. Savannah Linduff took over as the CJV Director in 2014. Savannah had been with CJV for a number of years as a Gold & Silver (Non-Travel) coach and an assistant coach on the 13 National team in 2014. In addition to coaching with CJV, Savannah also has been an assistant volleyball coach with local high schools and was previously a school teacher before joining the CJV Club. Savannah grew up in Greensboro, NC where she played USAV Juniors. Also in 2014, Alli Fleagle was hired to take over as the CJV Director for our Northlake location. Alli was a former college player, and in addition to working with the North CJV Program, she also was the coach of our first National team based out of our North facility.

Under the direction of Savannah, the CJV club undergoes major changes and sets in motion a long term plan for CJV to not only continue to be the best Volleyball Club in Charlotte, but also be the best Club in the Region, State and Nationally. To accomplish these long term goals, the club expands its Board of Directors to include Zoe Bell, Brian Rosen, Tim Leary, Wade Pearce and Alli Fleagle as well as many other changes such as:

- Rebrand Travel & Non-Travel TEAMS to be called National and Local TEAMS.
- Design New Professional Looking CJV Brochure.
- Create New and Improved CJV Website.
- Add More Volleyball Courts at South and North Locations.
- Offer an Increased Number of Competitive Local, Regional and National Level Teams.
- Introduce a Free Coach Training Program to Improve All Coaches in the Area.
- Increase Social Media Presence.
- Add New Lil' Spikers Program for Ages 3-8 years old.
- Offer College ID and National Clinics.
- New Beach Program.
- Begin to Host Local Tournaments with USAV, AAU, SAVL and Our Own CJV Tourneys.
- Implement an In-house Strength & Conditioning Program.
- Offer Central Booking of Hotels and Travel for Coaches and Teams.
- Continue to be the BEST Volleyball Club in City, State, Southeast and Nation.

In 2015, 20 years after first opening a dedicated Volleyball only facility called Volleyball Unlimited, Sports Connection decided to remove the indoor soccer fields at Granite Street and Northlake to make room for additional volleyball courts for the growing CJV Club. In addition to the new 4 courts in South Charlotte at Granite Street and the 3 new courts in North Charlotte, an outdoor sand/beach volleyball court was also built and CJV introduces a Beach Program. The CJV Club now has 14 dedicated indoor volleyball courts.

Over the course of two years (2014 & 2015), CJV had over 2000 girls and coaches participating in programs each season in South and North Charlotte utilizing the existing volleyball courts at the Sports Connection-Granite Street and Sports Connection- Northlake locations. The number of CJV National teams increased by 200% and the Local Programs also continued to grow. Players came from all over the Charlotte area from 215 different schools. The CJV Programs range from National, Regional, Gold, Silver and Bronze Teams, Practice & Play Programs, Lessons, Clinics and Camps.

In June 2015, after 20 years with CJV and over 40 years of coaching volleyball in the Charlotte area, Suzie Pignetti decided it was time to retire from CJV and volleyball to focus on grandkids and her tennis game. Suzie has been a coach or director with CJV since day one and is truly missed by all the players and coaches she has worked with over the years. Suzie continues to manage the "Serve For The Cure" charity volleyball tournament to raise money and awareness for breast cancer. CJV and Sports Connection continue to be a primary sponsor of the "Serve For The Cure" since its inception. (Note: Suzie continues to be on the CJV Board of Directors and "unretired" in 2016 to serve as a mentor coach for younger teams and coaches.)

Zoe Bell, who has been the CJV Assistant Director and with CJV since the very first day, assumes the role of National Director starting in 2015.

CJV continued to grow in 2016/17 and introduced 4 levels of NATIONAL TEAMS (Elite, National, Semi-National and Regional) and 4 levels of LOCAL TEAMS (Gold, Silver, Bronze and Beach). The number of total players surpassed 2200 players from over 250 schools and the CJV Club employed over 100 coaches and the number of National teams grew another 70%.

CJV plans to add more courts, coaches, players and teams at our CJV-Northlake Volleyball Center in 2017/18.....Stay Tuned...

The CJV Club is currently under the Leadership of a very dedicated and talented group of people.

CJV Leadership - 2017

Savannah Linduff - CJV Club Director
Jackie Bevington - CJV Club Assistant Director
Karen Stewart - CJV Club Administration
Sheila Walsh - CJV Club Administration

Zoe Bell - CJV National Director (Elite, National, Semi-National, Regional)
Brian Rosen - Asst Director - Player Development & Recruiting
Wade Pearce - Asst Director- Player Performance Enhancement & Recruiting

Tim Leary - Director of South Local Teams
Morgan Richburg - Director of North Local Teams

Carrie Christian - Retired, Current Board Member
Suzie Pignetti - Retired, Current Board Member
Allan Haseley - Sports Connection Owner

As Sports Connection and Carolina Juniors Volleyball enter its 23rd year of providing volleyball programs in the Charlotte area, we are very proud of the thousands of girls we have helped develop and perfect their volleyball skills over the years. Some of the players have gone on to play at the collegiate and professional levels, but most will look back on their experiences at CJV as one where

they learned to play a great game they will be able to play and enjoy with friends and colleagues their entire lives. With our help they were able to play their middle school and high school volleyball careers at a much higher competition level than before.

The Sports Connection is committed to continue to support and grow CJV and youth volleyball!

Carolina Juniors Volleyball
Sports Connection



(Note: According to the NCHSAA and NCISAA archives, before 1995, there were only a few volleyball state champions from any Charlotte area schools. Since Volleyball Unlimited and Carolina Juniors started in 1995, there have been over 30 high school state champions from schools in the Charlotte area. Many of the players and coaches from these schools have been part of the CJV Programs. Most every volleyball state championship from the Charlotte area was coached by a current or former CJV coach!)